



Mythopoeic Society

mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 1

1-15-1972

Mythril #2

Laura Ruskin

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Recommended Citation

Ruskin, Laura (1972) "Mythril #2," *Mythril*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythril/vol1/iss2/1>

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July 31 - August 1, 2021 (Saturday and Sunday)

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Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

Everything submitted for MITHRIL is read and discussed at Inklings II. If we can't use it as is, we try to send back a letter of comments and suggestions gleaned from the discussion. But do not ever feel discouraged, because we are all in the same boat. There are so many fanzines, apazines, rapzines, genzines, zinezines that if what you have to say is what anybody wants to hear, you'll probably see print. In any event, we wish you luck.

Keywords

Mythril; Mythopoeic





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Bonnie GoodKnight

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----The Editors of MYTHRIL

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75¢ per copy. Subscriptions: Four issues/\$2.25

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Ye Ink Stand



Dear Laura,

Some remarks, authorial and otherwise:

First off, please forgive the quality of typing...I generally pride myself on my typing, but coin typewriters are notoriously unwieldy, so...

If you want to add anything in the way of editorial comment, which is so fondly beloved by writers and editors for the very good reason that it helps them point out to readers things they may not grasp for themselves, you might mention that half of the story of TRULY YOURS is the painter's, which is not written down, only hinted at. He is not really to be blamed, because as we observe, he proved to be the more deluded of the two.

I might suggest, without being asked, that if you should run TRULY YOURS, an appropriate layout might be a wide square of type surrounding a sketch of Lloyd's painting--assuming that the story would fit properly (you see what I mean about coin typewriters--; indeed).

And that is all I have to say, mirabile dictu! Thank you for requesting my stories; see you at the next Inklings meeting. Namarie.

Yours,
Galen



Dear Miss Ruskin,

As an active enthusiast of literature pertinent to the field of heroic fantasy, I wish to extend to you my most hearty congratulations, in regards to your production of "Mythril." When Miss Newman (ed.--Lois Newman), in the course of a conversation, highly recommended your publication, I decided that it would behoove me to obtain a copy. After a rather thorough examination of your journal, I found my money to have been well spent.

During the course of my association with "fandom" it has been my fortune, more often my misfortune, to view countless amateur publications. "Mythril's" virgin issue avoided the numerous pitfalls which be plague such endeavors. As a literary journal, (ed.--a fiction journal, really; our literary quarterly is Mythlore.) your publication was, in my opinion, an unqualified success. Throughout the entire first edition of "Mythril," the imaginative writing and verse established and maintained a standard of literary excellence that is most uncommon in nonprofessional efforts. In the final analysis, the first issue of "Mythril" was extremely interesting and entertaining.

The stories which appeared within that issue are so enjoyable that I find it to be extremely difficult in deciding which tale I favour the most. After much careful consideration, I have narrowed my selection down to these three works: Lost in Sherwood, by Paula Sigman; The Conqueror, penned by yourself; and The Forging, so aptly written by Bruce McMenomy. It was unfortunate that none of the aforementioned stories were allowed sufficient wordage in which to be fully realized. Still, all these tales bode well of the potential, as professional writers, that their authors have.

Before closing, I should like to comment briefly on your literary endeavour, The Conqueror. While I can make no claims to being an accomplished historian, I have been since childhood preoccupied with the scholarly aspects of history; therefore, I believe that I may speak with some degree of authority. The Conqueror is not only well written, but is based on a rather unique interpretation of the subjugation of the Aztec nation. Unfortunately, your portrayal of Hernán Cortés is quite inaccurate, in an otherwise superlative piece of historical fantasy. I seriously doubt that an experienced soldier, such as Cortés, would have been awestruck by the death of a mere, in his opinion, pagan godlet. After all, had not Cortés assisted in the near-extirmination of the native populace of Cuba, before he celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday? (I think he did it before he blew out the candles--ed.) When the superior forces of Narvaez opposed this conqueror at Cempoalla, did not Cortés move his meager command daringly against his enemy? (ed.--Bernal Diaz del Castillo, who was there at the battle, recounts it in his Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521) Throughout his entire military career, Cortés displayed respect for only cold steel and bold strategy. With these facts in mind, I reaffirm my doubt that your characterization of Cortés was true to form. Still, despite your generosity to the shade of a most bloody reaver, you managed to render a tale well worth remembering.

In closing, allow me to wish you continued success with your every endeavour. I shall be eagerly awaiting your next publication, with the hope that the second issue of "Mythril" exceeds the excellence of the first edition. Until then, may the gods that reign supreme, grant you a lifetime of blessings.

Vaya con Dios,
F. Tyrone Bailey

Dear Miss Ruskin,

I would like to make a few comments of my own upon your comments...Concerning what the dream of a dragon, in this story, can actually be taken to be, the following. I was thinking in terms of the dream visions of the hero of William Hope Hodgson's House on the Borderland in part, that is, vague, semi-symbolic things without order or exact reference point, which can be interpreted to one's betterment, but never with exact surety. Another possible source is Piers Anthony's The Macroscopic. Pictures of actual events seen, but with no way of telling exactly when, or where.

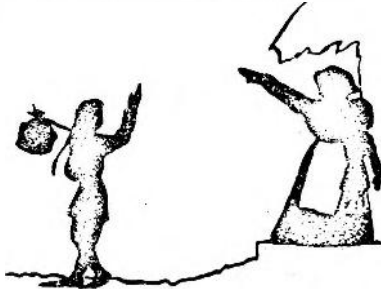
Thank you
Michael M. Levy

ONE STAYED HOME

BY SIMONE WILSON

Once upon a time not far away, there lived four brothers and their mother on a small farm. The first two were handsome and clever, and the third to balance things out was very slow indeed. But the fourth brother had neither a wealth or a lack of brains to recommend him, and was really not the sort to have a tale told about him at all, being instead rather honest and content and ordinary.

Now as is the way of these things, the first brother reached the time when he was eager to be gone and prove his worth in the world. So his mother cooked and baked for a night and a day and in the morning took a satchel from the closet. She filled it with marvelous things to eat and gave him what she could spare of her savings of gold and copper, kissed him three times and sent him with blessings down the road. He was never seen again, though in after years tales did drift up from the south of a wondrously clever horsethief whose presence was much in demand by the king's guard.



Now the stars went round in the sky, and it was not long before the second brother grew restless to test his talents in the world of men. So his mother cooked and baked for a day, took down a satchel, and sent him off down the road with food and gold and copper, though not quite so much as before. This brother never reappeared either, though there was news from the west of a certain indebted merchant whose ship was lost at sea with a cargo of geese and chickens.

Well the sun came up and sank, up and sank, and in really no time at all the third foolish brother wished to be gone, too, if only to escape his mother's swacks and scoldings, for he was ever breaking this and that, or getting a message wrong, or trying to milk the chickens. Of course his mother was glad to see him go, though she feared he'd be the worse in the wicked world of men. She took down a small bag, filled it with left-overs from the cupboard and with her few remaining coppers, and saw him off down the road, thinking never to see him again. As indeed she didn't, though jokes poured in from the east about the chief minister of an ever-dwindling kingdom.

Now this would be near the end of most tales of this sort, but it isn't the half of this one. For of course there was still the one brother who stayed home. His name was John and he was quite happy there, and lucky that was, for there was little enough food in the house in those later days and no money left to start a journey worth the telling. So the sun and the moon chased the

stars round the sky, until the last brother was a man grown, and when the old mother reached her time to die, she had nothing to leave him but the old house, now grown rambling and deserted with the three brothers gone.

"All I have left is yours," she said, "and 'tis little enough, though there is somewhere about the place an old metal box which may be of worth to you, but I could never find the way to open it."

Not long after his mother died, John searched the house, and on a shelf at the far back of the closet now emptied of satchels and all else, he found a large black box of battered metal, locked tight. Being neither very wise nor very foolish, he sat down to think what he should do. At last he settled on a plan: he would ask his nearest neighbor, a mean old woman with no children but lots of gold buried beneath her floor, so rumors went. He tucked the box under his arm and marched off to her door. She listened to the problem and with her characteristic bent of malice offered her solution. "Kick it," she said.

The box showed evidence of having been assaulted in this manner before. Still, one more attack mightn't damage it any more, so he planned it in front of him on the ground and gave it a firm tap with his boot. The lid rattled. Then John gave it a mighty kick; the lid sprang open as the box came to rest half a dozen feet away.

To his dismay the opened box revealed another box, smaller than the first and so covered with dirt and ink and grime that John could hardly make out the wood underneath or even the brass lock on the side, which held it shut.

His unfriendly neighbor had by this time lost interest and vanished into her den. John took up the disreputable-looking box and set off down the road, coming within about ten minutes to the main town. The first shop being the laundry, he went in to seek more advice. The laundress chased him and his dirty bundle right out again, but she listened to his problem from her front step and offered the first advice likely to come to her: "Wash it!"



She vanished for a moment, only to reappear with a scrub brush and bar of soap. These she tossed at the surprised lad and turned to more important matters.

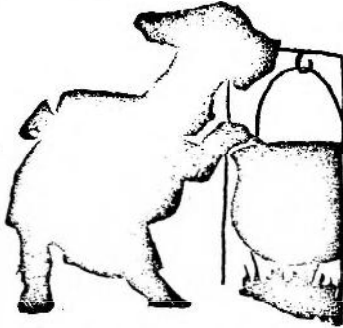
John dutifully picked up the soap and brush and began to scrub. The layer of dirt ran down the sides. As John attacked the ink-stains with renewed vigor the soapy water surged into the pores and cracks in the wood, which proved to be quite rotten, so that within a few minutes the box itself began to splinter. John eagerly ripped away the frag-

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ments, only to find still another box underneath!

This one appeared to be of some sort of stone, black and polished so that it shone like the new moon in the bright jaws of the old. No lock was to be found, only a thin crack all round the middle, where it should have opened but wouldn't.

By now John was getting rather used to this sort of thing, and he thought rather carefully about boxes, and stones, before his next move. Finally an idea came to him and he set off with a lighter step toward the town kitchen, where he found Corpulous the portly cook in his white cap and apron. The cook was feeding the fire under an enormous cauldron of boiling water, and after John explained the problem of his obstinate box, the cook winked one large steamy eye and pronounced: "Boil it!" John nodded, lowered the box into the merrily rolling water, and sat down with the cook to wait.



It was not long before they heard a resounding CRACK from the direction of the kettle. They hastened to peer into it, and, just as he had predicted, John saw several irregular pieces of stone at the bottom, the box having burst into fragments from the heat of the fire. Lying still, in the midst of them, was a very, very small box, neither metal, nor wood, nor stone, nor any substance he could recognize.

John fished it out and studied it: It was a perfect cube, about two inches each way, and it reflected like crystal the light filtering through the smoke of the kitchen from the open door. On its side was a tiny lock, holding it fast.

"Four boxes," he groaned, for by this time his treasure, whatever it was, if it was, was really getting quite small, along with his hopes. "How many more inside this one!"

The cook had no clever reply to this, so John took leave of him, ready to return home, for he had nowhere else to go and was getting very hungry besides.

On his way back John thought up and discarded half a hundred ways of approaching the frustrating box without totally destroying it and its mysterious contents. At the edge of the town he came to the house of the chief elder, a man reported to be so wise that John never even dared speak to him. He was desperate enough now though to swallow his fear and approach him. He stepped to the door, gave it a few quick, nervous raps, and sprang back as an owl flew out from the ledge above, screeching and scolding and scattering cobwebs and loose plaster.

At a reply from inside he timidly pulled the latch and peered round the edge of the

door into the room. The old man, his wispy white hair drifting about his head, sat at a table amid tottering towers of old books and loose papers. As John ventured a step through the door the man raised his head, fixing on him bright blue eyes like sky swept clear of storm. At his movement a few stray papers skittered over the table's edge and swooped to rest in a corner.

John began to stammer, "I...there's... it's...I have...a box....," he ended simply, holding out the small object to the elder.

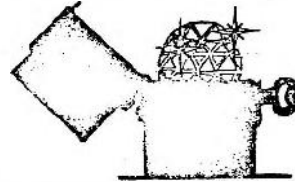
To John's surprise the old man nodded his head vigorously, his bright eyes glowing with even greater light, as if it was all quite clear. "Of course, the box, the box. Good for you, you've found it!"

"But I can't open it!" John protested, by now thoroughly confused.

"Why, no, of course not. I have the key, don't you see?"

"No," said John.

"Ah, wait a bit, then," replied the other. He fumbled in a deep pocket in his robe and brought out a small ball of red string, a wishbone, three stale cakes, a handful of crumbs, a tin whistle, and finally a very small shiny key. This he handed to John, who wonderingly fitted it to the lock. It turned. Lifting the lid, he saw cushioned in velvet a large jewel, flushing deep scarlet from the cloth that held it. John held it aloft in the light, where it shone paler, its smooth faces flashing off-angle images of himself, of windows and shelves, even for a moment snatching the sparkling deep sky of the old man's eyes.



There was something else as well, a small paper, half-hidden in a fold of velvet, which crackled stiffly as John spread it flat to read.

"To my last son," it read, "I have left you this, my one real treasure, such as it is. It will not settle your fortune, but when you've the wit and will to open this last box, then you will have the stuff in ye to handle both the farm and the money the jewel will bring. It is more than ever I gave your wandering brothers. My blessings are ever upon your way...." It was signed by his mother.

"She's given you her last and best," said the elder gently. "Myself she entrusted with the key, should you reach the final box and find the right way to it."

"But I've done nothing; every time it was someone else who showed me an answer!" John protested, remembering fragments of boxes he'd left in a trail behind him through the town. "Each time I had to ask for help, and last of all from yourself."

The old sage grew still, almost solemn were it not for the joy and laughter in his eyes. "There are many ways to seek answers, and there is more wisdom than most would admit in simply asking for help. And the only final answer was to come to me with the smallest box, for only I had the key to that; so you did find the right way."

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THE LEGEND OF ROCH NESS OR HOW GEORGE FIEFIELD BECAME PRINCE OF SKUL SKERRIE



BY SHARON WELLS

SYNOPSIS

Young George Fiefield, an orphan of the Scottish North Sea shores, meets one night while strolling on the strand a sea-fairy, Shorala. The beauteous sprite bears him in her shell-coach down to her undersea realm. Wearing the dolphin talisman she gave him, George finds he can breathe beneath the water. She asks him to riddle with Wise Star Fish and spin Scottish tales for kindly Granny Herring. George complies, gladly if slightly puzzled. Arriving at her grand palace, George learns that Shorala is Queen of the Skul Skerrie Silkies, whose kingdom is threatened by the stirrings of the serpent Prade, and moreover that he is somehow involved in their plans to save their lovely realm. He waits for Shorala to explain.



PART 2 CONTINUED

Shorala looked him in the eyes. Her own jade eyes were sparkling proudly. "We want you, George, to kill or destroy Prade. We want him driven from the North Sea. If you cannot do this, no one can."

At first George thought that it was all a dream and that he would soon wake up in bed on his little sheep-farm. Then he thought that maybe he was lying unconscious back on the beach, but as Shorala stood up and faced him, he knew that it was all truly happening. No one could imagine such loveliness. She kissed him on his forehead. The courage to fight welled up within him and his love of the sea bubbled up to the surface.

"I shall fight until death does take me away, if need be," he said to those gathered in the chambers.

A large, bearded Silkie raised a cup in toast. "Then we shall name you, George the Dragon Fighter, and wish you well."

The other Silkies joined him at the table and George could see that this was the beginning of the Farewell Party.

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When George first opened his eyes the next morning he thought that perhaps the previous night's happenings had all been a ride on the dream mare, then he realized he was wearing the golden necklace of the Dolphin and he knew that it was not a dream. He thought of his sheep dogs, Leroy and Elroy. At home they usually slept on his bed or as close to it as they could get. He wondered how they would fare this morning.

Young George looked around his new room. It was a high tower chamber. The view from his window this wondrous morning was quite extraordinary. It was daylight without, and from all over the North Sea, the Kingdom of Skul Skerrie, thousands of brilliantly decorated Mermaids, Mermen, Silkies and Fish were coming to see him before he left. Their striking coats shimmered like alizarian crimson. Their skins glittered like Prussian azure. George could see kaleidoscope lines of blue, green, yellow and red coming over the green sea-weed pastures and hills.

There was a knock on his door and Shorala entered.

"Good morning, George," she greeted him. Today her voice was a bit deeper and there was a sort of caring about it that focused around him.

"Good morning, my Lady," he bowed.

"Today is the Great Day." Shorala held out her jeweled hand. "Let us walk in my garden."

He took her soft hand and left with her. As they wondered and pondered through the golden garden they gazed upon silver sea-flowers and diamond-like trees. Shorala's gown was dripping with deep crimson rubies and sparkling with the small pink flowers which were splashed between the stones. It was quite a contrast from the loose, flowing gown she had worn the night before. It was

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"George, you must win this fight by your wits," Shorala began. "Dragons of all sorts are clever, so you must be at your very best. We'll all depend upon you."

"I would offer up my life," he said quietly, feeling that it wasn't enough.

"Yes, I know," she whispered, turning her face away.

"I loved the sea before I even knew of you and all these beautiful folk. Now that I do know you, my love is strengthened a hundred fold."

Her eyes met his for a moment. She stood young and strong like a lily, yet she seemed to suffer. George could not see that she cared for him more than he could dare hope for. He did not know that she had secretly watched over him since he was a babe left on the widow Killison's step.

"You must prepare now," she said officially. Her caring was again hidden by the veil of her mind.

George nodded and stood watching after her as she departed.



A fair young Silkie came to George. They had met only briefly the night before, and they went off together for it was now nearly time for George to depart.

George was dressed in princely clothes and given a magnificent cape of deep night-sky blue. A Sea Horse was presented to him. It looked much like a Land Horse, but it had the ability to breathe the water as a Silkie does. Its name was Shadowglass, for he had been named after his Great-Cousin. He was from the Very North and he was the swiftest horse in all of the Earth.

George rode out amongst all his well-wishers. Looking back, he saw Shorala waving a crimson scarf from her tower window. He waved back and then turned Shadowglass North towards the Sleeping Dragon, with no weapons excepting his wit and a beautiful ruby ring Shorala had given him with the words that it worked by the power of Love.

By night-fall he had come to a small cave where he and Shadowglass stayed with some friendly yellow crabs.

The next day George came upon a high hill. Looking down into the Valley before him he could see Prade sleeping amongst his treasure hoard, for dragons, as we all know, are very fond of treasure as a bed. George dismounted Shadowglass and, sneaking up quietly, approached Prade. His only chance was to get at him before he woke up completely, for a dragon of any kind was likely to be a bit dull-witted just after a five hundred year nap.

"Wake up," George shouted, "Ye sleepy-head of a dotard Dragon!"

The Great Sea Dragon opened one huge eye and looked out sleepily. "What do you want, Little One?" he growled. "Go away or I shall eat you."

"I am challenging you to a race," George called, "Or are you afraid to lose?"

"What?" the Dragon got to his wobbly webbed feet. Gems began to fall from his scaled coat and belly. "I am Prade, afraid of nothing."

"So then we'll race," George smiled.

The Dragon was still astonished. "You must be a madman. I shall just eat you," he yawned.

"So, you are afraid!" George turned to walk off as if disgusted.

"No! Never," Prade stood up and stretched. "We shall race, I shall win, and then I shall eat you."

George smiled at Shadowglass as he mounted him. "All right," he called to Prade, "I'll race the first half by Sea Horse, and the second half by Land Horse."

Prade stopped to think for a moment. There was some old rule in the back of his sleepy, angry head about land, but he was too muddled. "I'll remember it later," he decided.

"You count to three then we're off, you slimy green beastie," George laughed deeply.

"Well!!" Prade had never been insulted before. "Fine. One, two, three."

And they were off.

As the Sea Dragon followed George and Shadowglass through the watery main he remembered that he had neglected to ask where they were going, but being a sleepy Dragon of very little brains at the time, he decided it was of no importance, that he would win anyway.

Several hours later when they were near the beach below his farm, George whispered into Shadowglass' ear, "Land Ho!"

Prade was following right behind, very sure of himself and angry with this little bold man. As the water became more shallow, George jumped from Shadowglass' back and raced for shore. Reaching the beach, he looked around. It was a black night, not a soul taking a stroll along the pebble drift. He took the necklace of the Dolphin and carefully placed it in the pocket of his vest. George quickly climbed the steep path to his small sheep farm and looked back to make sure Prade was following.

The Sea Dragon was half in, half out of the water trying to remember the old rule before going further. He might have remembered the rule which was so important, but he was distracted by George who had come riding down on his grey speckled mare, Sara.

"Come on, ye creaking dullard of a Dragon," he shouted above the crashing surf. He was acting brave, but he was terribly frightened and he could feel his heart beat in his throat. What if the Dragon decided not to follow?

"Dullard, am I?" Prade yelled back as he darted clumsily out of the ocean and onto the beach.

Turning, George rode inland as quickly as his terrified mare could go. Prade followed wondering why he suddenly felt so heavy. The further on they went, the more difficult it became for the old Prade to breathe. Soon the Sea Dragon was dragging way behind on the heather and George was often forced to chase back to him and infuriate him enough to make him follow. At one such stop, Prade remembered the rule he had been trying to recall. He then knew he would die if he didn't get to water quickly, for that was the rule:

"Without exception, Sea Dragons Live Not, Never, Nowise Upon the Land."

Truly Yours

by Galen Peoples

Dear Lloyd,

So the quest of my younger years is ended, the one that you embarked me on, and I've a few matters to take up with you. You do remember me, I trust--Peter Woodby? If not, let me refresh your memory.

It was a year ago next Wednesday that you rang me up excitedly and bade me come over to your flat, that you might unveil your latest masterwork to my critical but sympathetic gaze. You'd done the same before, Lord knows how many times, and how was I to know this would be any different?

I came, and you led me to the covered canvas. The dust-motes about it seemed to float in an ocean of mystery; the white--well, dirty grey--fabric that clothed it was like the handkerchief from under which the magician his bouquet of flowers. But never, I trust, a flower such as that. Slowly, you removed the cloth; and, oh! what a falling-off was there! You can't imagine what that painting meant to me. The effect, you observed, but that was only a hint of what interiorly pierced me. Perhaps I didn't even see the work you had intended; perhaps some accidental combination of color and form bewitched me, so that I imagined a radiance, a perfection, an end to longing, that was not there. But I think not.

I think not, because I remember I cried, "What a beautiful creature!"

and you nodded unsurprisedly, and I cried, "Her eyes are like black opals, lying on the smooth plain of a sunset-drowned, flesh-tinted desert!"

and you nodded and smiled, and I cried, "The opals melt into a shimmering black cascade of hair, rushing from her imperial brow down to her dainty marble hand!"

and you nodded and grinned, and I cried further, "Her neck--her body--slopes and tapers and curves like the finest sculpture ever molded by a god's hand!"

and you said, "Yes, isn't it true?"

"And those sumptuous surroundings!" I went on. "Could anything else do justice to her beauty? The twin vases, the pillars--Can she, she must be, as rich as she is beautiful!"

You said nothing then, but eyed me suspiciously.

"What's her name?" I said.

"Lisabeth," you said.

"I'm in love," I said firmly.

It was more the fashion then and there than now and here, falling in love with portraits, but I knew I was, I had to be. Every woman I'd ever known was only preparation for this.

"Where does she live?" I demanded--are you beginning to remember? "You must tell me!"

And you were reluctant at first, but you did tell me, and before I left, you were nodding and grinning like a loon again.

My return home was spent in an ecstasy of anticipation; love flowed out from me and

hovered around me, cushioning me against any perception of the grey and eternal. Only the light of the moment streamed through all my limbs and nether protuberances. I felt like Christ.

Then, beaching finally at my own small flat, I found waiting for me a letter. My request had come through for a transfer, far to the north--I had forgotten that entirely--and I was to leave that evening. The envelope had been delayed, had arrived now; if it had only waited a day! Still, I rationalized, it gave me time in which to steel myself for the encounter; already my airy delight had begun to be supplanted by dread, a stomachless chill, for I hardly knew what I was going to say to her. Now I had time, time in which to compose a declaration of love.



As it developed, a year passed before the mesh of business complications freed me to return south. You, who were moving perpetually in those months, must know that. I was never able to get in contact with you. That was when you began to become generally known, wasn't it? I recall that somewhere in the middle of my northern stay, I was surprised but happy to read of the success of your exhibition. I wrote you--no, wired you--congratulations, care of the gallery, and urged you to write. But you never did.

So, without any support from you, without any clue to what the lady was like or what her preferences were, I returned by train, town past town; changed trains; arrived at the station of Nott--her town; took a cab from the station to Fancy--her street. That is, I suppose I did all these things: a kind of daze numbed me to everything. Without it, I don't suppose I would have been able to pass through the wrought-iron gates, cross the garden (which wasn't, I observed through my fog, very well-tended), mount the steps to the white--white?--doors, and swing the knocker.

A man answered, dressed in black and of impressive visage. "Yes, sir?"

"I want to see Miss Lisabeth Omley," I said, and wondered: Did I have the name right?

"Why?" he asked.

Here my facade broke; feeling foolish and burning with embarrassment, I stammered out, "The painting--beautiful--in love--had to see her."

He stood with his mouth open, or more accurately, his lips parted, then began to shake my hand vigorously.

"Come to see Lisabeth?" His mask broke into a hundred kinds of smiles. He surveyed my attire, I thought, hungrily. "Come in, come in! I'll get her straightway! I'm her uncle!"

He turned away; doubtless, I imagined, he would hurry upstairs, and shortly she would float down them, a seraph in pink, the pink gown that had embraced her body in the painting. Unless--

"No!" I cried, forgetting myself, then began to explain: "The vases. This first time, I must see her by the vases."

But it was too late.

"Lisabeth!" he had called, in too soft a voice to penetrate to any but this and the next room. He had heard me, though, and looked questioningly at me. "Vases? What vases?"

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"The painting--two vases--"
 "Oh, ho!" he laughed. "No, no, I'm afraid that was a bit of your friend's imagination at play."
 "And--the pillars?" I asked hollowly.
 "Pillars? Why, he must have added those at the studio. He didn't finish it here, you know, only the rough sketch of Lisabeth, more or less--"
 And on the sounding of her name, I heard a high little voice from only ten or fifteen feet away pipe out, nasally, "Uncle, was you a-calling me?"
 "This young fellow here says he's in love with you. Go on, fellow, turn about: this here is Lisabeth."

I shut my eyes, and turned, then slowly, reluctantly opened them. Somewhere, peering through a crystal ball or in tea leaves, you must have been laughing at the irony of it! Your vases, false; your pillars false; and Lisabeth--

She had a wart. It was a very large wart, all but obscuring her nose, but not the jungle of pimples beneath which, somewhere, lay the terra of her face. Apart from these distinctions, she was just recognizable as the lady of the picture; her lips were too full perhaps, her eyes awkwardly large and too close together, her ears too wide, but still if one adjusted here, pushed up there and out elsewhere--and above all, lopped off that God-awful hair, that straw dipped in tar--one might have emerged with a fair likeness to your vision. Not dressed in lace and velvet, but in wart and pimples.

The dress--that is what angers me most of all. To flatter a human being's vanity, you might modify their features to a minimal degree of aesthetic acceptability, but this dress, this inanimate slab of dreariness, which had once, if thirty years ago, known happier days--how could you have glorified it so shamelessly, until it was a parody of its former elegance? And why, could you not at least have warned me that one of Lisabeth's fingers was missing?



I did not walk, I ran, from that house, direct to the station, from which I departed for what had been your flat, the only address I had for you. The next days, I used trying to hunt you down, and the nearest I came was your exhibit, still showing, but (I noticed) at a somewhat less respectable gallery. I sought among the paintings there for my Lisabeth, the one I had fallen in love with, but sought in vain. I asked the proprietor of he had seen such a picture, or its artist; he referred me to your "discoverer," Luxore, he who had masterminded your first, and enormously successful, showing.

Luxore told me he did not understand you; a brilliant artist, yes, yes, but no businessman. If, however, I cared to get in touch with your wife--your wife! I did, certainly, for more reasons than one, and Luxore agreed to make the introductions. We met at his gallery.

"Where is he?" I asked, trying to appear as amicable as I could.

"Why, I don't know!" she answered--your wife! Didn't anyone know anything for sure?

"You don't know!"

"No. We lived together only a month, then left each other. Like all lovers."

"But you married him!"

"He protested that he was in rapturous, uncontrollable love with me and had to marry me. Of course, I let him."

"Why?"

"Why not? None of my other lovers objected, so why should I?"

At that moment, my friend, I felt pity for you. It has since dissipated, so if I see you again, I'm still likely to mar your features severely--not this time for the original sin, the angelification of Lisabeth, which I've now forgiven, but for what your wife showed me.

I asked about the painting, and she laughed, the same laugh she must have presented you with when you asked about her lovers, or while you were one of them. Then she led me to the canvas, which she assured me (and Luxore agreed) had been the biggest success of the exhibition, before you insisted on re-working it completely.

Fortunately, that act (which Luxore still bewailed) had not diminished its popularity; indeed, after the show ended, Luxore had insisted on retaining this single canvas.

You know all this. But I'm still struggling to apprehend it; I struggled then. I stared, and your wife laughed; I stared. Where were the twin vases? Why had you replaced them with carved lions? By what sorcery had you managed to turn the marble pillars to palm trees? And what had you done to Lisabeth, poor little Lisa with her soft voice like a shrill toy? Why was her gown, that had been soft pink, now hard red, as if dipped in blood?

And why--why, you bastard!--did she have your wife's face?

Truly yours,
 Woodby



MR2

JUNIPER HILL

by Tatiana Szeftel

BLACKBIRD PIE

Marjorie Silverseed, wed to a wizard and mother of eight, lives at the foot of Juniper Hill. One evening before departing for places unknown, the wizard leaves a spell for each child--a magical sneeze, to be given on the eighteenth birthday. Nicholas Silverseed, the oldest boy, will be eighteen in a few days, and he hurries home through the countryside of the Kingdom of Southmarsh. Meanwhile...



Four o'clock had tolled from Thornybrooke Castle tower: tea-time for most folk, and a rather more important ceremony for the king. His Majesty Tobias the Fifth, King of Southmarsh, removed his scarlet-slippered feet from their plum velvet footstool and signalled the nearest guards to send away those that still lingered at the great hall doors. Audiences were ended for the day, and he now prepared to make his visit to the royal countinghouse, where he would remain closeted for one hour among the cofferers of coins, gems and other treasures, stacking the gold and silver into neat piles, and attending to the accounts of the realm. This custom had been established three generations earlier by King Reginald Girthbuckle, or more accurately by his queen, who had encouraged him to replace his afternoon tea (at which he was given to overeating) with a more constructive occupation, thus providing the kingdom with an excellent financial system, and its ruler with a relatively painless diet. As Reginald's descendants had all proved his equal in corpulence, and all had competent and solicitous wives, the habit had become a tradition and was now inviolable, though not, perhaps, without private regrets on the part of King Toby.

In the chambers of Queen Elianora quite a different scene was taking place. Before a fragrant fire of apple wood, well replenished against the biting March air, her Majesty the Queen of Southmarsh prepared to take tea with her ladies-in-waiting. Though "tea"

it was called (that being what the common people drank with their meals) the actual beverage was steaming elderberry wine, ladled by Lady Margaret from the cauldron on the hearth into small decorated mugs and sipped genteely between nibbles of bread and honey, currant buns and the queen's own seedcake. Elianora was much acclaimed for her baking, though she had done little of it since her marriage. Queens in Southmarsh were not expected to perform menial tasks, and many of the lords and ladies frowned upon Elianora's activities in the royal kitchens. She, however, the heiress of a small Duchy to the East, had been raised in a country manor and bred to industriousness, so seedcake continued to appear at the Queen's Tea, and blackberry tarts in the great hall at dinner, as well as embroidered seat covers in the King's chambers, for the Queen was also skillful with her needle. All in all she kept herself at least as busy as her husband.

She sat now in the carved oak seat by the window, her calm, cool face inclined over her embroidery. Her ladies chattered gaily by the hearth, for though their mistress considered fires in March an unnecessary luxury, they were glad enough of the warmth themselves. This was their one hour of freedom to gossip, as the Queen also disapproved of this most innocent and delightful pastime, and the ladies were not wasting the precious moments in silence, except to sip at their wine between secrets.



Adjoining the Queen's apartments in the North Tower, the princess Clarissa was locked in her room. Her embroidery had progressed only negligibly during the past weeks, and she had been banned from tea until her piece should be completed. Skipping tea was no hardship for Clarissa, who had plenty of friends in the kitchen, but she would much rather have spent the time in the stables or the garden, and she dreaded her mother's scrutiny of her handiwork at the end of the allotted hour. Clarissa hated embroidering. She also hated weaving, lute-playing (though she liked to listen), holding her back straight, and being announced at balls, which she

was now old enough to attend, being sixteen years old and of "marriageable age." Marriageable! Clarissa was sure she would hate marriage even more than holding her back straight. None of the dukes, knights and princes that her mother considered "suitable" at all suited Clarissa; either they bored her with long tales of their exploits, or they sickened her with flowery speeches, or they infuriated her with attitudes of cold, polite respect. There had even been one who had frightened her: a great brute of a man with wild shaggy hair and flashing eyes from beyond the Overmoors. Clarissa had considered marrying him, since she thought she would rather be intimidated than bored, sickened or enraged, and had almost made up her mind to accept his proposal when her father had sent him away, declaring with a roar that he was an "unsuitable" match after overhearing a remark by the Moor Lord that Clarissa had thought screamingly funny. So she had been stuck with the others again. She hung out of the window now, heedless of the wind tearing at her carefully ordered hair, and wished she were riding through the Overmoors with the Moor Lord, or better still, without him. Away in the distance she could see the first hills of the South Moors rolling West toward the Windrush River; to her right lay the encircling arm of the Thorn Wood, a mass of dark green and shadows beneath the cloudy sky. Clarissa wondered if anybody lived in the Thorn Wood, and what they were like, and whether she would see them when she finally rode out the castle gates and over the Castletown Bridge to her new home, South, East or North. She sighed and turned back to her embroidery, which lay on the window seat beneath a heap of tangled silk threads. Clarissa had allowed her kitten Muffins to romp among the skeins today, and there was a knot in the green silk that she would need to use next. She picked at it half-heartedly and in a sudden flash of defiance threw the strands into the fire. She would pretend a headache when her mother came to examine her work, and wheedle fresh silk from her nurse Juliana after dinner. Meanwhile there was still dinner itself to be endured:

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the Grand Duke of Walton Wold would present himself as a suitor this evening. She frowned, biting her nails. How could she manage to have dinner sent up to her room? She could not maintain the earlier headache, for her mother would send her to bed early and make her take gruel, both of which Clarissa disliked. Besides, she was hungry. No, she would have to make the best of it. Hearing her mother's ladies in the passage, she smoothed her hair, scooped up Muffins and arranged herself languidly in the chair nearest the fire, with her embroidery on her lap. As she closed her eyes she heard the door open, and Lady Margaret's voice hushing the others.

"She's asleep, dear lamb," said Lady Margaret, to whom Clarissa was still a child. "Look at the pair of them. Precious, aren't they."

"Asleep, at this hour?" came her mother's voice. "Nonsense. She has her father's temper and her father's ways, though thank goodness she has my looks; and his Majesty never sleeps on an empty stomach. Clarissa!"

Clarissa opened her eyes slowly, blinked, and focussed on her mother.

"Oh, madam!" she exclaimed, feigning surprise, "I beg your pardon."

She rose, leaning on the arm of her chair, and curtsied. Her mother surveyed her coldly.

"I am somewhat faint," apologized Clarissa. "The heat of the fire—"

"The heat of the fire and your dislike of needlework have conspired to give you a headache," nodded the Queen. "Though doubtless you will be feeling much better ere dinnertime. Let me see your piece."

She took up the square of linen and scrutinized it.

"Not a stitch, I see," she remarked, tossing the material back on the chair. "I am sorry your health is so poor. Juliana will administer a potion before you descend this evening: I hope that will improve your spirits. Juliana," she said

oems

by PAULA MARMOR

the piper

In vast woods shadow-burnished, dear
the severed verge of Evershade
is merged with dawn's blush burgeoning,
emerging on the turning year

Sheltered by the slumbering wood
a crumbling heap of tumbled walls
sleeps hollow at the winter's end
that dauntless in the autumn stood

And in the gard of Summerhold
no weirds are woken: closed and barred
the barren gardens blue with snow
wait grave-cold for their truant guard

Wandering down the nightmarch road
a darkside dancer wound the dales
within the dim-branched borderwood
a shadowlord bore toward the hold

Through wanwoods pied with twilight dawn
and piles of night drawn to the west
he passed twixt silent shade-wrought trees
and played his reedy piper's song

Spring welled from his silver flute
and shivering fell to star the ground
with flower carpets pink beneath
a canopy of trees in bloom

The glades grew dappled, pale and sweet
with apule-snow and brooklets gold
that leapt their babbling pebbled path
to laughing lap beneath his feet

Yet on the stairs of Summerhold
no steps are echoed: silent wait
the sober gates set grim with gold:
The sleep of stones no spring-bird breaks

Through barren woods new-turned to bowers
proud boughs born of blossom-pearls
the piper poured his life to earth
passed to the world his ebbing powers

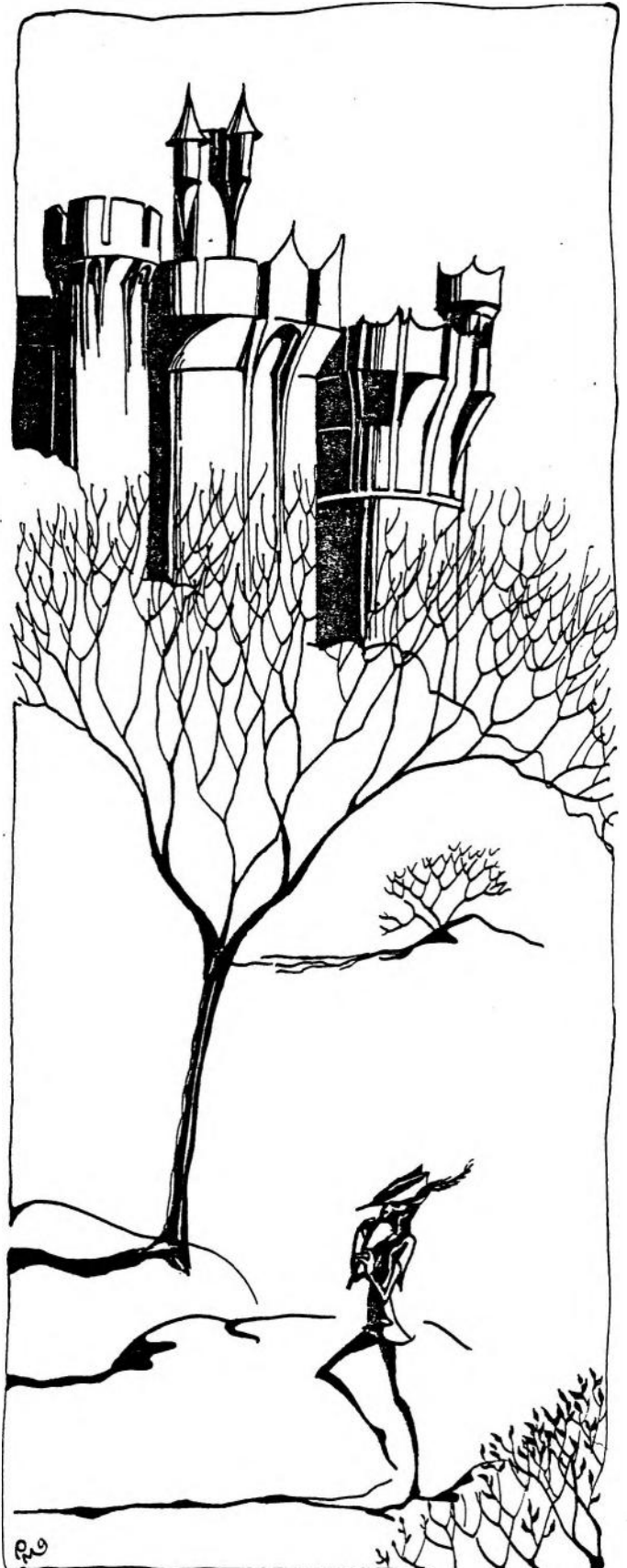
The spells spun prancing through the distance
spattered glistening on the grass
a wake of crystals, spilled and flowing
following his twisting dance

His far-off tune flashed rainbow thin
a glint of glittered gossamer
blown onward like a blossom-seed
tossed fleeing on the freshening wind

Yet in the halls of Summerhold
no summons tolls on solemn bells
no song swells swift and string and bold
for time drifts slow as summer wells

Empty lie the living woods
like lovers spent, they breathe and sigh:
bright butterflies glide 'mongst the branches
where the dancing piper stood

Yet when the glades touch green with brown
and trees dance gowned in summerleaves
the weirds will come weave garland crowns
to grace his brow and grant him peace.



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## the song of the swallow

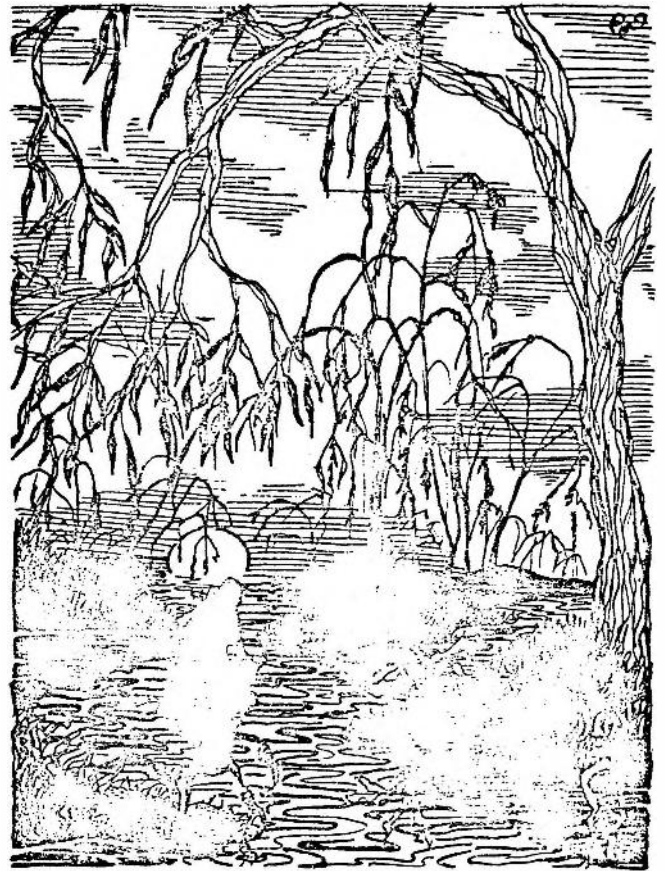
Come, steer the withlied watermeads  
meandering streams and braided shoals  
in sunset's shade and watersheen  
marbled bronze and verdigris  
through verdant lowlands laced with rills  
and jade-green valleys veined with gold

Come, ride the river's roving course  
past bracken, gorse, and blackthorn stands  
where sandbars run beside the shores  
where forests mute the rapids' roar  
where water bores a reed-meshed wash  
and spreads across the ocean strand

Come, voyage on the violet seas  
where eventide flows lavender  
and silver lace and filigree  
float flashing on the light-etched leagues  
of burgundy and brandywine  
that lie behind the Evenstar

Come, sail the swell to Zanzibar  
and banished lands beyond our time  
where burnished sands yet bear the scars  
of vanished cities, broke and charred  
to ashes churned by burning winds  
and turned to cinder-stars by night

Come, find the lost uncharted isles  
enchanted lying frail and wan  
where pale and graceful towers rise  
and linger through the darkling night  
though larks dethrone the nightingale  
and elven realms fade with the dawn.



## heatherfields

The last warm breath of autumn lost  
blew brown and gusting through the fells  
with dusty smells of heatherfields  
and folded hills of feathered grass,  
of dry rills rusty in the dells  
and musty birch burned gold and brass

Under clouds of rustling leaves  
touseled by the russet wind  
a rutted wood cut through the groves  
where shadows clustered purple-brown  
round restless bare-boughed terebintns  
and oak trees clothed in winery shrouds

A jangling echo sounded there  
of brazen-bangled tambourines  
and soft winds through the tamarinds  
and violins: a fleeting glimpse  
of caravans crimson, gilt and green  
the land ships of a gypsy prince

The west ran scarlet into night  
and spiral wound the wheel-scarred path;  
the splintered tracks, through burning spires  
of birch-tree pyres set aflame  
spun turning, winding into black  
and passed me by: the wood's end came

I stood: the dead and desert air  
stirred my skirts and scurried dust  
along the sterile empty road;  
the wind shifted, cold: I sniffed the tide  
and winter, rising in the dusk  
through musky heatherfields grown wild.

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MR2

THE COMPLEXITY OF DREAMS

by Michael Levy

In the deep rock cavern the dragon groans and moves in her sleep, for she dreams badly. The high arches of stone flicker in and out of seeing as she exhales, sending plumes of glowing steam twisting through the air currents. Light flashes and runs beneath her through the gold and silver of her dragon's hoard bed. Her red nostrils flick sending spasms of motion down her sides, over and between her scale plates, all the long way to her tail. Her tightly furled wings rustle.

She is an old dragon, born long before the fall of dragons, ancient even then. Her years of life have taught her how to survive by strength, by stealth and by guile. She has out-battled, or out-thought all of the enemies she has met, the other dragons, the flesh-eating birds who fly the skies in packs of thousands in the far south, the knights and men at arms. She has bested them all.

She dreams badly, for dragons do not dream like ordinary folk. When asleep the dragon's soul (for they do have souls, as do we all) roams the time of Forever. Here all things are happening. Eternity is one. She sees her birth and her death, and the ways of escaping or finding each. As gazing into a crystal, confused images and hints pass before her eyes. She sees her all, her joys, her sorrows, her everything, while she dreams. It is a confusing picture which can never be ordered, but from which a wise dragon, if she can recognize the present, the actual, the future, and the merely potential, can extract much knowledge.

The dragon stirs again in her sleep. She lies more on her left side than her right, and one leg kicks out smashing a wall of grey stone. The ground shudders. Boulders fall and bounce off her scales and leave no mark. There is a sound like the distant thunderroll. The steam flies from her nostrils and lips in surges of glowing agitation. She sleeps badly.

In her dream all is grey, but it is a huge greyneess of vaulted stone shot through with flashes and steam. There is a grey-green shape immersed in the grey from which the flashes come. She knows herself then, but there is something else!

A small bit of silver strangely reflecting her glow moves cautiously towards her. In its upraised hand is a shining rod of pain. It flashes its sharpness and promises death. The dragon shudders in her sleep and groans.

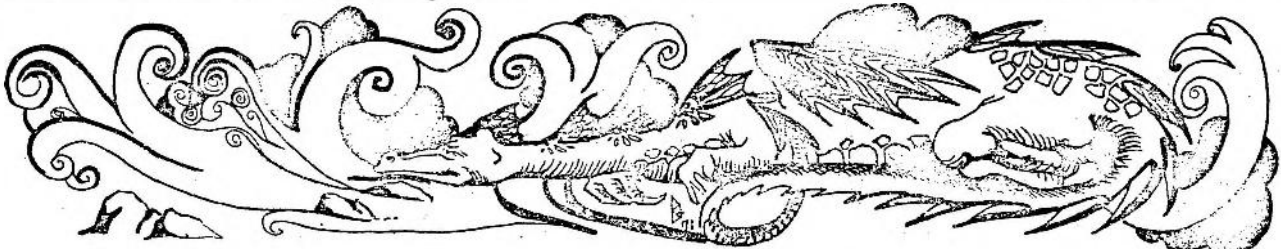
The figure advances, its sword upraised to strike and kill, and...the dragon leaps up bellowing, shaking the cavern as rocks fall about her. The blackness is destroyed by the blinding light of her awakened flare. She shouts her challenge to the attacker and her thrashing tail and thrusting wings strike sparks from the rocks. All is thunder and lightning and she crashes out from her den, through the caves, brushing crumbled rocks from the walls about her as she passes forth into the daylight.

The dragon pauses as she reacts to the blinding light. The brilliant sun shines down from a cloudless light-blue sky onto the flat rocky land around the cave mouth. There are few plants to mute the colors of the scene. All is harsh yellows and browns, a desert land.

She sees her knight, her attacker, her dream-cause. He sits silently on his steed. Both are shining silverlike in the sun. His lance is well-couched in its place and points to the dragon's heart. She can almost feel its sharpness, the entry of it into her body, piercing with little immediate hurt, but a growing pain which will soon lead to blackness. His silver sword is unsheathed. It lies across his lap.

The dragon rears in the sunlight bellowing her defiance. She leaps forward in a surge of ironlike muscle and her wings crash down pushing her upward in a gigantic and overwhelming attack. The knight, plume a-flying, spurs his horse forward. They meet in a crash of scaled flesh against armored flesh and the horse falls backwards, its body shattered by the impact. She feels a slight pain as the lance passes through her wing ripping it, but the wound isn't mortal and now she has the knight beneath her. Her flames spurt about, burning, her teeth crush and...it is done. She looks up from her kill and for the first time notices that there are other men present, but they, she sees, are fleeing. She rests before her dead knight. His broken lance lies crushed beneath her foot. She rests.

The dragon lies in her cavern dreaming. The world of Forever is complex. It is often hard to know what is real and what is dream. She has lost her way, mistaking the present for the future, the potential for the actual. Even now as she dreams the death of her knight, she dies defenseless beneath his blows. Her blood mingles redly in the glow of her lessening flame with the dragon's hoard gold beneath her. She is his.



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One Stayed Home

When he had finished speaking, the sage remained standing for a bit, gazing out the window (but at nothing in particular, John thought), smiling softly, but to himself. Then he seemed to be aware of the room and of John once more, and with pleas of other matters to attend to, turned back to rearrange his stacks of fluttering papers. John found himself on the front step once more, being surveyed by the owl, who was on guard once more. He turned toward home, as he went smiling more and more, his own eyes shining with a glow like the eyes of the elder, or reflecting the lustre of the jewel that both had seen.

So John returned with his new treasure to the old farm, where he lived the rest of his days and married and raised a family of many sons and as many daughters. His household prospered for he was always ready to ask advice or to give it. But the jewel he kept, in its box on the high shelf at the back of the closet. After all, he might someday have need of it. But to give it, not to use it.

The Legend of Loch Ness

"Help me, I'm dying," Prade called out weakly.

"Follow me, I'll take you to water," George called, "You're an old rascal and you need to be taught a lesson. Don't think your size qualifies you to go bothering the smaller animals."

"Anything...just water," Prade called as he stood up on wobbling feet.

"Right there," George pointed ahead, "It's a loch. You'll be happy there."

Prade rushed forward with his little remaining strength and just made it into the water in time.

"Now," George called back, "You'll be contained here forever, for you can never breathe one more breath out of water."

"Yes, I know," Prade began to cry, "all my treasure left behind." And, still crying, Prade sank down to find the bottom of the loch.

"That should keep him for a while," George spoke kindly to his tired mare, "Loch Ness is bottomless."

5

When George arrived back at the Royal Palace there was great rejoicing for many days. He was barely given a chance during the festivities to see Shorala. Too many fish and sea folk were trying to get close enough to hear his story. Many a minstrel had put his tale to song.

Finally on the third day of celebration he had a chance to be alone with Shorala.

"George, you must now make the choice: to stay here, or go back to Scotland," Shorala told him as he held her hand. He knew the decision would soon come to him and he was loth to hear her speak of it to him.

"I do love Scotland," he looked into her deep green eyes, "but I love all this more. I would give up anything for the sea."

"But, you must understand that if you stay you must become a Silkie," she said hesitantly.

George fingered his necklace of the golden Dolphin. "Wouldn't this do? I can take it off when I go inland and leave it on when I'm with you."

"No." She shook her head. "You would grow old and I would stay young. We Silkies are immortals. Even if that were not so, a mortal is allowed only five days of life under the sea. Your time shall be up in just ten more hours."

George looked away from her and in doing so he looked up towards the sky far above the water's surface. It was morning. The light shimmered softly through to the two of them as they sat in the shelter of Shorala's radiant garden.

"I must stay with you, Shorala. I have no choice, for I love you," he confessed.

"Then you shall stay," she seemed to glitter before him as she smiled, "For I love you too, but did want to be mannerly, not bold, or I would have said so upon our meeting. I have so much to tell you."

Then Shorala spoke in a soft happy voice to George for many an hour and she told him of his parents who had died at sea when he was but a few days old. It had been Shorala herself who had taken him safely to land and to the home of the widow Killison, for she was a good woman and much acquainted with the magic of the sea.

That night in a ceremony which is held in the deepest secret, George became a Silkie of the First School of Skul Skerrie. He was then gifted with one day on shore to sell his farm, or give it away as he chose, and to take care that none of his animals were left homeless.

George left the sea and stood on the beach in his velvet-like crimson robes and magic rings. Around his neck hung three powerful necklaces: one from Shorala as a token of her love; one from Wise Star Fish as a token of acknowledgement of George's wisdom; and one from Granny Herring which was a token of her affection. On his brow he wore a crown of gold and sea-flowers. Needless to say, his costume looked out-of-place on his little Scottish farm.

He spent a good deal of the day strolling the hills. At last, he climbed up to his farm house and sat down at his kitchen table to write a letter to his friends. When he was finished he took a last leisurely stroll across to the barn and spoke kindly to his mare, Sara, who had helped him win the race against Prade.

The sun began to set behind the hills. He had to leave now. As George walked back to his farm house he saw his neighbor, Mr. Kern, who was tending the flocks along with George's two dogs, Leroy and Elroy.

"Hello, Mr. Kern," he called gaily.

"Say, it's George, is that not?" Mr. Kern came quickly over. "But, what are you wearing, son?"

"I have been made a Prince of Skul Skerrie," his voice sounded softer to Mr. Kern. "And I shall live under the sea from now on. The North Sea is now my home."

"But you can't, son," Mr. Kern thought that George had gone mad.

"I've come to give my farm to the young Starlem," George continued, "I shall leave

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you in charge of it. You may have the mare if you want her and Elroy and Leroy. I must go back to the sea now; my time is almost up. I've spent most of it roaming the hills."

"Why, George Fiefield, where have you been?" Mrs. Kern cried as she came from behind the barn. "Little Mary has been over to see us asking if we've seen you."

"I must go." George began to feel as if he was choking.

"Hold him back, Frances," Mr. Kern called to his wife, "He thinks he can live in the water."

Mr. Kern grabbed George's arm as he tried to run for the path down to the beach.

"No, let go," George gasped. He was suffocating on the land. Pulling with all his might he tore loose and ran down to the sea. Mr. and Mrs. Kern and the two dogs raced down after him. "Goodbye forever," George called back, "I've got to go now."

"No, lad, you're sick." Mr. Kern pulled his cloak as they struggled in the surf. "Why, your cloak's not getting wet," Mr. Kern realized.

George tore away and dove into the waves to meet Shadowglass. The Kerns stood staring at the incoming sea for quite some time.

"He's gone now," Mrs. Kern said very

softly.

"Yes, but I have a feelin' that he's havin' himself quite a good time." Mr. Kern looked at his wife. She looked up at him surprised. "He said something about being the Prince of Skul Skerrie."

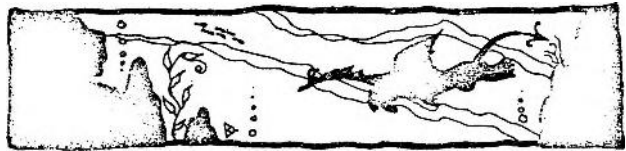
"But, Husband, that's only a legend, isn't it?"

"We'll never know, I guess," He put his wool cap on, "But, now I think it's time to get the herd in."

They walked back to the farm, each deep in his own thoughts.

EPILOG

Soon after George and Shorala were married and even today they rule the North Sea, and they are wise and just rulers. As for Prade, he's still diving around in Loch Ness, looking for some sort of treasure to sleep on, and the bottom.



Blackbird Pie

turning to the nurse, "see that her Highness does not overeat at dinner; I would not wish her to suffer from indigestion as well as from headache. Until later, Clarissa."

"Until later, madam," murmured Clarissa, curtsying again as her mother swept out the door, and making a face as it clicked shut.

So, she was to have one of her nurse's awful potions, and on top of that, she would not be allowed to eat properly! Clarissa had a hearty appetite, which the queen considered unladylike, and as a result it seemed to the princess as if she were always hungry. Today her friends in the kitchen had all gone off to the fair in Castletown, so she had had no snack at tea-time, and her stomach was beginning to growl, with little hope ahead of her being able to comfort it. Was it really more ladylike to have a growly stomach than to eat a big meal? Clarissa didn't think so. She picked up Muffins with another deep sigh and followed her nurse into the sitting room of her chambers where the potions were kept.



Beyond the grounds of the royal residence, lights were pricking in the dusk. Thorn Brook foamed swiftly under the bridge of Castletown, swirled about the stone pillars below gnarled, jostling houses sleepy with lampglow and the warm scents of kitchens, snickered at the placid mullioned panes as it scurried toward the far-off sands. Secret noises woke in the woods and fields, rustling the sun away from its last farewells to tree and tile; the watchmen, warned, chased the last merrymakers out of the marketplace, now littered from the day's festivities, and fastened shut the gates at the town's outer end, barring strangers and shadows from King Toby's bridge. Along the parapets small lanterns swung, reflected in the darkening water, to light the way to the castle for any late-riding messenger.

The outward road to Kettleford lay dim in the March twilight; no lamps lit the stones and holes for horses here. The little paths to Applecote and Meadowgarth were darker still, hedged round with hawthorn, bramble, whitethorn higher than a pony's head; beyond them, farms lay snuggled in the hollows and the cloughs, breathing tame assurances of dung and firelight, bolsters and thatching, to tired and lonely travellers.

But the traveller to Applecote this night was neither weary nor afraid, and he whistled as his pony plodded onwards toward home. He would not reach Knobbles until tomorrow noon, nor Juniper Hill till close on sunset, but his pockets were full of copper coins, his wallet of bread and sausage, and his heart of high spirits, for he had sold all of his wares at the Castletown Fair, and his mother would be well pleased. He was a farmer and woodcarver, his name was Nicholas Silverseed, and he would be eighteen years old the day after tomorrow. In half an hour he would turn off the road, tie up the pony and roll himself in his cloak for the night, but the first stars had peeked out to grin at him, and there was a sharp rind of moon daring him to entertain it. Nicholas smiled a secret smile and accepted the challenge with glee, for next to Old Martin and Oliver Gill he was the best rhymers and riddler from Candlewick to the Threeding Downs, and he would make that shining crescent so drunk with laughter that it would set half an hour early. He paused for a few moments, collecting his thoughts, and then began to rhyme, improvising on an old tale according to custom. The song was a simple one, nothing so witty as those he had composed for the four feast tournaments in Knobbles, nor even as those

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he amused his brothers and
sisters with on winter nights,
but it would serve to set the
moon laughing and his pony
yawning before they halted
in some covert to sleep.

There was an old dame,
if the tales be true,
who raised all her children
inside of a shoe

So many there were, and
the shoe so small
that she slept on the doorstep
to watch them all

For the lads lay outside, and
the bairns in the toe
and the maids crowded all round
the heel in a row

With three kittens between them
to keep them warm
and Jumper the collie
to guard them from harm

The bairns would all cry
for they'd nothing to eat
and the old dame would slipper

them on their back seats
On the wailing that echoed
from that tiny shoe
could be heard from the sands
to the Mountains of Roo
The neighbors threw pans to
drown out the sad sound
so she bought the bairns gruel
and fed them all 'round
Then they all went to sleep,
and they snored the night
through,
which is what it is time for
Nog and me to do.

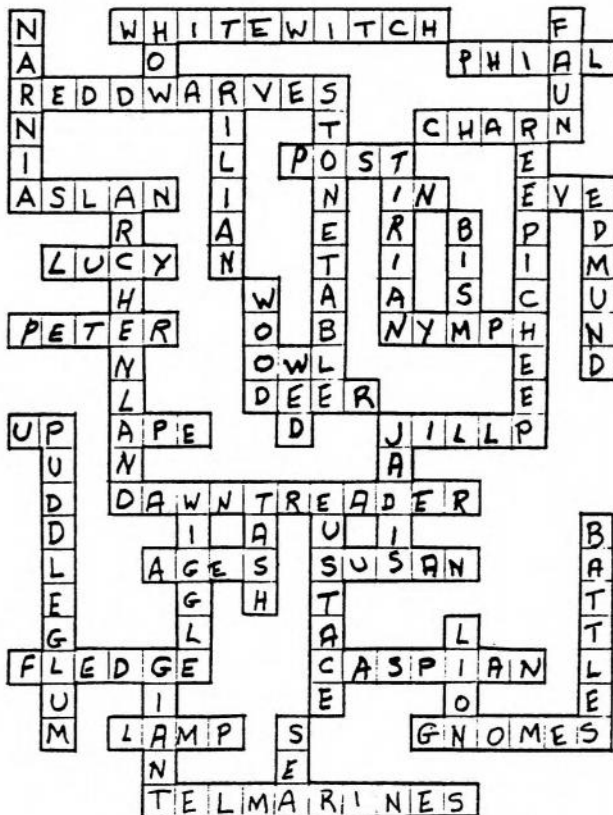
"Isn't it, Noggin,"
yawned Nicholas, guiding his
pony toward the edge of the
road. He had spied a thicket
just behind the hedge that
would give them ample shelter.
The moon rocked gently over-
head, waving him good night
and thanking him for the
amusement, though they both
knew she had heard far better
from him at the Three-Gold

Feast last autumn, when Old
Martin had been too ill with
the gout to compete, and
Nicholas had won the purse
from Oliver in a four-hour
battle that he still glowed
to remember. He slanted a
half-smile up at her as Noggin
ambled beneath the shadows of
the thicket; she had been a
good audience, and he had not
tried very hard to please her.
He would give her a better
performance at the Seedblossom
Ring come April. He reined
Noggin to a halt, slid to the
ground, flung the reins about
the nearest overhanging branch
and tumbled onto the carpet
of leaf-mold, rolling his
cloak about him. He sighed
once, snuggled deeper among
the woollen folds...He was
asleep.

Continued Next Issue



ANSWER TO NARNIAN CROSSWORD PUZZLE



SMAUG BY DORIS ROBIN

Deep in doomed dwarf tomb
Coiled scarlet weaves jewels and gold
Dark — but for fitful fires
Red Smaug savors doings of old.
Deep the dragon's drawn heart
Obsessed dreams of his cursed trove
And ever the fey Arkenstone
Through mind beguilingly wove.
Deep the dwarves direful thoughts
Ponder vengeance and treasure returned
Far mem'ry of fateful event
Unavenged in their honor is burned.
Deep desolation now lies
On the hold and great hall once of Thrain
Unhindered Smaug rules his court
Will dwarf ever delve there again?

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